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DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ELA; DRL/IRF COFSKY

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KIRF](#) [KISL](#) [PTER](#) [EG](#) [IR](#)
SUBJECT: EGYPT'S SHI'A CRACKDOWN

REF: CAIRO 547

Classified By: Economic-Political Minister-Counselor
Donald A. Blome for reason 1.4(d)

1. Key Points

-- (C) According to Mohamed al-Darini (ref A), a leader of the Egyptian Shi'a Supreme Council of the Descendants of the Prophet, Egyptian security forces have arrested approximately 300 Shi'a since mid-April. The Council's headquarters has been shut down by authorities.

-- (C) Most of those arrested have been released, but al-Darini reported that twelve remain in custody, including Egyptian Shi'a cleric Sheik Hassan Shehata Moussa, arrested in early July.

-- (SBU) Shehata, arrested for "showing contempt for Islam," is a well-known Egyptian cleric who converted from Sunni to Shi'a Islam.

-- (C) According to al-Darini, Shehata is being badly mistreated in Cairo's Torah Prison.

2. (C) Comment: The arrests occurred in an increasingly anti-Shi'a environment. In December 2008, after Hizbollah leader Hassan Nesrallah's harshly criticized Egypt's response to Israel's Gaza operation and again in April, following press reports that a terrorist cell with Hizbollah connections had been uncovered in Egypt, state-controlled and some independent news outlets warned of growing Shi'a influence in Egypt. (Note: On July 26, Egyptian prosecutors announced that 26 alleged members of the Hizbollah cell had been referred to a state security court for trial on terrorism-related charges.) It is not clear why Shehata and the others were arrested and the GoE has not given a public explanation for its actions. MFA Deputy Assistant Minister and Counterterrorism Coordinator Ashraf Mohsen told us the GoE could not comment on Shehata or the other Shi'a arrested. Al-Darini suggested, without providing any further explanation, that the crackdown is related to the GoE's rivalry with Iran.

3. (C) In a July 27 meeting, al-Darini told us that since April, Egyptian security forces have quietly detained around 300 Shi'a. According to al-Darini, 60 were arrested in Cairo's Abu al-Nomrus neighborhood and another 240 were arrested in 6th of October City, a Cairo suburb which is home to an Iraqi Shi'a refugee community. Al-Darini said that all, except Shehata and his eleven followers, were released by mid-July, without charges, although some of the detainees were foreigners who were deported.

4. (C) According to al-Darini, security officials detained Shehata on July 2 at Cairo International Airport upon his return from Syria. Twelve followers were arrested soon afterwards. Shehata rose to prominence in the early 1990s as

the imam of a Sunni mosque. His sermons were often televised and widely circulated on tape. In 1994, Shehata became a proponent of Shi'a theology. In 1995, the GoE arrested him on charges of "insulting Islam" and held him for several months. Since his release, Shehata has maintained a low-profile. According to al-Darini, lawyers representing Shehata, including from well-respected human rights NGO the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, report that Shehata has been tortured.

15. (C) Al-Darini said that Egyptian security forces ordered him approximately two weeks ago to close his organization's headquarters. Al-Darini complied.
Tueller